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Lebanon
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EXCISE

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American Embassy
Beirut, Lebanon
May 16, 1953

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

PARTICIPANTS: H. E. Saeb Bey SALAM, Prime Minister of Lebanon
Honorable John Foster DULLES, Secretary of State
Honorable Harold E. STASSEN, Mutual Security Director
Honorable Harold B. MINOR, American Ambassador
Honorable Henry A. BYROADE, Assistant Secretary of State
Honorable Douglas MacARTHUR II, State Department Counselor
REPORTER: Armin H. MEYER, Second Secretary of Embassy

PLACE: Home of the Prime Minister

DATE: May 16, 1953

DEPARTMENT OF STATE. A/CDC/MR
REVIEWED BY JWOLF JR DATE 6/1/82
PORTIONS DENIED AS INDICATED

Prime Minister Salam prefaced his remarks by stating that he wished to speak informally and frankly as one who is a true friend of the United States. He was speaking, moreover, not only as Prime Minister but as a private Lebanese and Arab citizen.

1. Grave Situation in the Near East. According to the Prime Minister, the United States formerly held a position of esteem and friendship in the Near East. The faith which the Arabs had in America has, however, been lost and it must be regained. He said he knew the Secretary is determined to restore the Arabs' faith in the United States and hoped the way would be found to do it. There are three key problems facing Lebanon, the Prime Minister said. The first is misery. Behind the show window which the Secretary probably saw there is widespread poverty, he said. The second problem is the Arabs' genuine fear of Israel. Communism is the third. In discussing the latter, the Prime Minister stated that the present extent of Communism in Lebanon was a new discovery even for him, its roots being deeper than he had imagined. He recalled how he was known as the arch enemy of Communism when he served as Minister of Interior in 1946; since his recent ascension to the Premiership he has found the Communist situation not only worse but growing actively. He pointed to the demonstrations today in connection with the Secretary's visit as one aspect. He also cited as Communist-dominated the teachers' strike, which he had through redoubled efforts settled before it could be connected with the Secretary's visit. The Prime Minister said he hoped the Secretary would realize the gravity of the situation and he added the belief that reports from United States representatives in the field are not always listened to by the State Department. He asked the Secretary kindly to do his best to help ameliorate the situation, particularly with respect to the following problems: Egypt, Palestine and the refugees, and North Africa.

2. Gravity of Situation Reason for Visit. To the Prime Minister's remarks, the Secretary responded that the fact that he, Mr. Stassen, and their colleagues were in Lebanon showed that the gravity of the situation in the Near East is recognized by the United States Government. President Eisenhower himself had asked them to undertake this journey, even though they had many pressing matters in Washington. Asserting that the new administration in Washington is prepared to review its policies, the Secretary assured the Prime Minister that the United States' desire to do something about the serious situation in the Near East could be taken for granted. Knowing just what to do was, however, a more difficult problem.

3. Egypt. Discussing the Egyptian question, the Secretary stated he had in Cairo done what he could do to facilitate a solution. As a result of his efforts, as a minimum, time had been gained and assurances obtained from both sides to avoid hostilities.

4. U.S. Relations with France and Britain. The Secretary said that as the Prime Minister must realize, the problems of Egypt and North Africa were extremely difficult for the United States. As he had told the Foreign Minister, the United States has not forgotten that it was once a colony and that it fought for its independence. The United States, he affirmed, has not lost its faith in freedom. He cited the American record in Cuba and the Philippines and added that still today American influence is being enormously in freedom's cause. He cited specifically his recent extremely frank talks in Paris. This is all done quietly, he said, as a family dispute. If the Prime Minister knew all the things that went on, the Secretary said, he would realize the United States is exercising its great influence for what the United States stands. He cited the present flare-up between members of the British Parliament and the American Congress as another reflection of differences of views between the United States and her allies. He declared, however, that those in responsibility in foreign countries, such as Prime Minister Salaam, must realize that the things which the United States is trying to achieve may be lost for centuries if there are divisions in the elements of the free world which have power. He referred to Stalin's "last will and testament", a Stalin writing of last October, wherein the Soviet dictator asserted it would not be necessary for the Communist world to fight the West, that given sufficient dissension they would kill themselves off. Prime Minister Salaam agreed that this was precisely what the Soviets are after, and he denied that Near Easterners expected the United States to break with Britain and France. The Secretary said he did not ask the Prime Minister to conclude that the United States' course of action was the right one but he did feel there is room for honest belief that tries to work these issues out gradually without an open breach. Noting that it is not easy to find the right course, the Secretary said he felt the new Washington administration was entitled to some faith that it is trying to do the right thing.

5. Colonialism. Returning to the problem of colonialism, the Secretary pointed out that the United States Government is exerting strong influence in favor of colonial and dependent people. He recalled his efforts with the French with regard to Indo-China. In Egypt, too, the United States is trying to find some formula. Here he recalled how he was compelled to issue a statement to offset the remarks of Prime Minister Churchill. According to the Secretary, it would be very easy to work out a solution in Egypt if one side trusted the other. He and Naguib had agreed on a statement of principles, but details cause breakdowns because of a lack of mutual confidence. The exercise of this type of influence by the United States, he said, cannot be heralded from a street corner; one must keep a veil on it.

6. Palestine Problem. The Israel issue, the Secretary said, presents a number of difficult problems -- not solvable at once or quickly. The presence in the Near East of this high-level mission was in itself a good sign, the Secretary stated. Furthermore, the administration has asked for increased aid to this area, both for Israel and the Arab states. This is something concrete and a break with the past. Other problems, the Secretary said, were of lesser importance. One of these is the border frictions between Israel and Jordan, an issue in which some forward steps were taken during the Secretary's visits to these countries. The Secretary said in Israel he had spoken quite frankly to Prime Minister Ben Gurion and Foreign Minister Sharrett, informing them that United States' policy is determined to restore the confidence of the Arab states. He said he had stated frankly that the United States would not carry out a policy partial to Israel and that the United States would not indefinitely finance Israel immigration. This latter policy, according to the Secretary, is already having a stabilising effect for Israel's immigration has tapered off to where it is almost as low as Israel's emigration. [redacted] B-1 ED With regard to Jerusalem, the Secretary thought some formula might be devised not wholly excluding the political authority of Israel and Jordan but establishing some sort of international control there. The refugee problem, he said, also needs solution but this is not readily achievable. Some observers, he noted, argue that Israel should invite the refugees to come back and they won't come. In the Secretary's view this may be true but it still does not solve the problem. Power and water projects in Jordan, he thought, would assist in solving the refugee problem as would pasturage in Syria. He felt that refugee projects should be carefully linked with economic aid for the indigenous populations for otherwise if anything at all is done for the refugees they would be better off than many of the native inhabitants. Summing up, the Secretary said he thought it possible on this issue to change the atmosphere as far as the United States is concerned. It need not be all pro-Israel and there were many concrete ways in which the United States could aid the situation. It will not be possible to make everybody happy, he said, but the United States would do the best it could.

7. Arabs Will Cooperate. Prime Minister Salam responded to this detailed explanation by saying that Arab hopes, which had been raised by the incoming of a new American administration, were clearly well-founded. He realized the many aspects of all these problems and did not want to see a breach between the United States and its allies. However, time was running out and the need was for early solutions. The actions of the previous administration, he said, had given the impression that the United States was dominated by Jewish interests; he hoped sincerely the Secretary's work would not be hampered by domestic political influences, particularly from Congress. Finding full Arab cooperation, he said, further in the Secretary early [illegible] the difficulties. American friends, like himself, looked to that [illegible] leadership. The Prime Minister added a reminder that solution to the Egyptian question has explosive argument, for that thereon in Egypt is [illegible] throughout the Arab world.

8. Churchill Speech. The Prime Minister was gratified that the speech of Prime Minister Churchill had not destroyed the good effect of the Secretary's visit. He, however, suggested that the Prime Minister Churchill statement did not [illegible] the Secretary's endeavors and due to the wisdom of the Secretary who has successfully [illegible] foreign affairs since 1947. He, Sharaa thought, this statement [illegible] with the Arabs would look forward to with hope. Sharaa spoke at length in which the Prime Minister pointing to today's demonstrations [illegible] described as unusual, stressed the urgency of the Near East situation. He. Sharaa in reply added that the new administration be given a little [illegible] things out.

9. Pipeline Negotiations. In parting the Prime Minister asked the American Visitors to do what they could indirectly to induce American oil companies to take a liberal view toward the upward revision of their pipeline agreements with Lebanon. Lebanon needs the money, he said. The British are obstinate on this issue, according to Prime Minister Salam, and it is his hope that the Americans can be made to be more conciliatory. Time having expired, there was no further discussion.

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